

Musical, Rhetorical, and Visual Material in the Work of Feldman

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Kurt Ozment, "Musical, Rhetorical, and Visual Material in the Work of Feldman"
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Abstract: In his article "Musical, Rhetorical, and Visual Material in the Work of Feldman" Kurt Ozment compares early and late scores by Morton Feldman and argues that Feldman's interest in the visuality of the score was not limited to his experiments with graphic notation. More specifically, *Projection 3* (1951) and *String Quartet II* (1983) suggest that Feldman experimented with notation from beginning to end. Up until the early 1980s, one of Feldman's main strategies for commenting on his music was to refer to painting. In his essay "Crippled Symmetry" and in an interview with the percussionist Jan Williams, Feldman also turns to rugs, linking the patterns in his scores to the materiality of certain rugs. Feldman's emphasis on the materiality of paintings, rugs, and notation stands in sharp contrast to the materiality of the spoken and written comments themselves, which tend to cross media.

Kurt OZMENT

Musical, Rhetorical, and Visual Material in the Work of Feldman

Any composer is concerned with notation, whether it be verbal or visual (see Figures 1, 2, and 3):

Figure 1: Morton Feldman, *Projection 3* performance instructions (for two pianos, 1951). The folder that encloses the score appears in the background. This folder reprints Feldman's autobiographical essay (1961), which served as the liner note to the LP recording of *Durations I–IV*. Copyright release by C. F. Peters Music Publishers to the author.

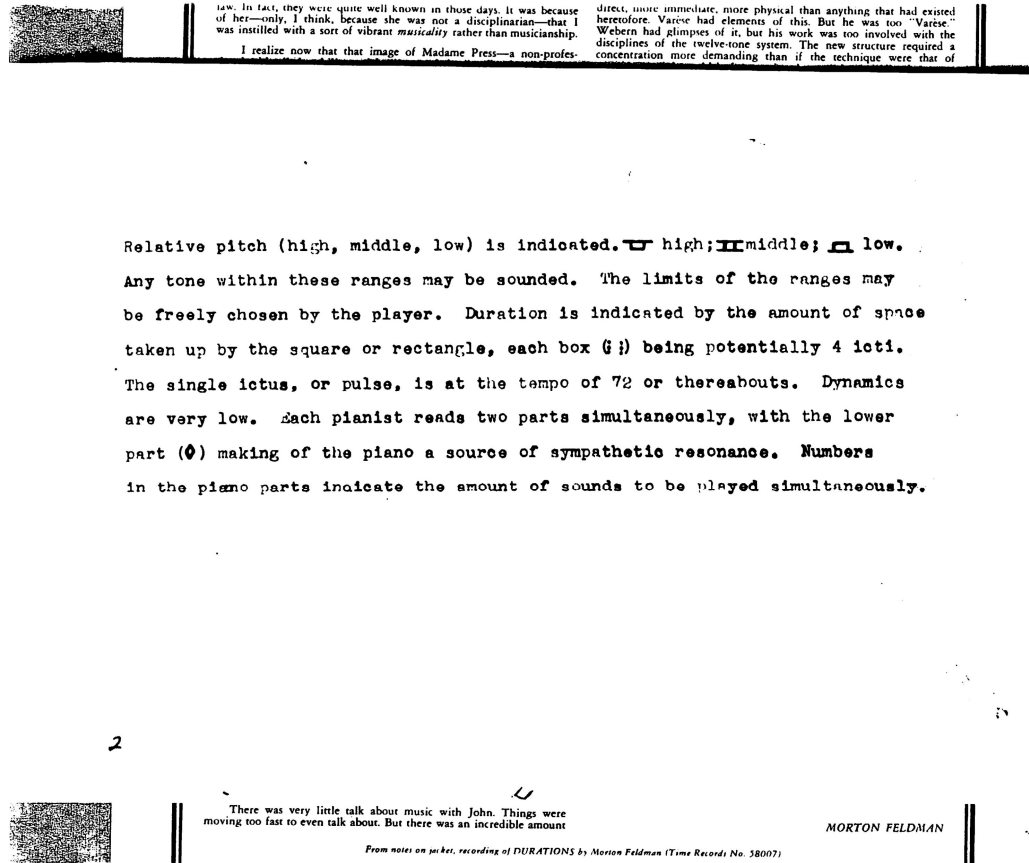


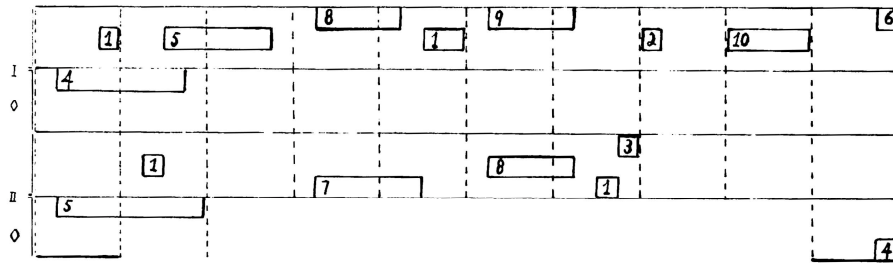
Figure 2: Morton Feldman, *Projection 3* 1 (for two pianos, 1951).
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PROJECTION 3

Morton Feldman

1.

Figure 3: Morton Feldman, *Projection 3 2* (for two pianos, 1951).
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2.

Any composer, that is, who employs notation. My opening statement implies a restriction that is, at once, conventional and problematic, given that notation need not be considered a constitutive element of musical composition. The distinction between "composition" and "improvisation" has, at least in some corners, been broken down. When I say "any composer," I am speaking of composers whose use of notation locates them within a particular musical tradition. How to be more precise about this particular musical tradition is a question faced by anyone who writes on music, including composers themselves, who are often expected to comment on their own music, as well as on the field in which they compose. The US-American composer Morton Feldman, invited to speak at the festival "Nieuwe Muziek," in Middelburg (Netherlands), in 1985, addressed this question in the following way: "I'm perhaps the only Dutch composer in Holland because I feel I'm out of Mondrian and Willem de Kooning. I feel I'm out of that tradition; serious and experimental" (*Feldman in Middelburg* 1 54). Feldman also touched on the same question when lecturing one year earlier, in Darmstadt, Germany, during the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* (International Summer Courses for New Music): "What is our tradition, what do we have? I want to tell you what I feel is our tradition. I'm saying our Western tradition. I think if we leave it we're slumming — like me going to Harlem. In fact, I don't feel I'm in the West here, I think the tuning is too high. I feel like I'm in some underdeveloped country, with some crazy ... I was in Vienna, I heard my music, I didn't recognize it! It was so high tech!" ("Darmstadt Lecture," *Summer Gardeners* 116; the passage is modified slightly to make the transcription more idiomatic; see also "Darmstadt Lecture," *Essays* 195).

In both passages, Feldman provides a definition of the field in which he composes — in one case by crossing both national origin and forms of art (Dutch and US-American, painting and music), in the other case by making a series of analogies in which "high" and "low" are repeatedly crossed. This crossing results in an internal division: two places where "our" tradition is preserved and reproduced

— Darmstadt and Vienna — are represented as being foreign to it. Alongside the crossing of categories in the first passage cited, there is a naming of positive terms: "serious and experimental." Feldman identifies himself with a "serious and experimental" tradition. He would seem to imply that this tradition is musical, although it would be more accurate to say that Feldman does not limit this tradition to one particular art. He invokes more than one art; he refers, implicitly, not just to music or painting, but to both. Rather than maintaining a distinction between the two arts, he mixes them. Feldman identifies a tradition by naming Mondrian and de Kooning, two Dutch painters who ended up in New York. Feldman, a (former) New Yorker invited to give a talk in Holland, includes himself in the synecdoche that links Mondrian and de Kooning to an "experimental tradition." It is possible to read these two proper names as falling, at once, in a tradition parallel to Feldman's, i.e., painting, and in a broader experimental tradition that includes both music and painting. Although Feldman would seem to be pointing toward a single possibility, what he says implies multiple possibilities: he suggests that music does not have an experimental tradition, that music can have an experimental tradition, that music has an experimental tradition, that there is one experimental tradition, that there are many experimental traditions. In the second passage cited, Feldman posits a Western tradition, a tradition that he repeatedly refers to as "our tradition." By suggesting that going to Harlem, Darmstadt, and Vienna all amount to leaving the tradition, Feldman underlines the specificity of the tradition itself. The strategy here is not one of providing examples but, rather, counter-examples. Harlem, Darmstadt, and Vienna are each excluded, albeit in different ways, from what Feldman calls "our tradition." Feldman's ironic attitude toward place and the connotations of place might ultimately be extended to the very question of "our tradition." In other words, perhaps Feldman's understanding of "our tradition" is expansive, rather than restrictive. But at the same time, Feldman seems anxious about the boundaries of the "Western tradition," and by denigrating one place after another, he would seem to argue for a more restrictive approach towards this tradition. By representing himself as the only thing that embodies "our tradition" in his travels, he posits a narrowly defined tradition without actually specifying what it consists of. No one gets it right, he would seem to say, but this does not limit him from calling for others to join him in reproducing "our tradition." Feldman speaks, on both occasions, at festivals of "new music." He foregrounds the context in which he speaks by drawing attention to its limits, but he also moves outside of those limits by speaking, on both occasions, of his interest in rugs. He thus invokes yet another tradition, one that is, at once, non-musical and non-Western.

In the liner note on *For Frank O'Hara* (1976), Feldman makes an analogy between the surface of painting and the "surface" of his music. Strictly speaking, Feldman does not spell out an analogy here: "My primary concern (as in all my music) is to sustain a 'flat surface' with a minimum of contrast." There is, however, an implied analogy, and an implied passage, between painting and music; this is underscored by putting a term borrowed from painting in quotation marks. A visual metaphor is used here to focus our attention on an aspect of Feldman's work that we assume is not visual. The analogy between the "surface" of painting and the "surface" of music works by passing from the visual to the musical. The passage from painting to music, on the back of a visual metaphor, results in a form of melocentrism: exclusive attention to the music that disregards the visibility of the score. The "composition" of Feldman's scores, the visual relation between one graphic element and another, has not gone unnoticed, however. Kyle Gann, Tom Hall, and Bunita Marcus have all drawn attention to the graphic dimension of Feldman's conventionally notated scores. Peter Price has claimed, more broadly, that the score has always had "a tendency towards abstract visualization" (conference paper). Feldman's *Projection 3* (1951), one of his graphic scores, provides an example of the degree to which spatialization plays a determining role.

For the performers, the score indicates what to do. In any performance, there will be a difference between what is indicated in the score and what is performed. The materiality of the score is not the same as the materiality of a performance. In Middelburg, Feldman speaks of his interest in both: "About ten years ago — I'm very involved with how the score looks — I found an almost mathematical equation: that the crazier my notation was, the better it sounded" (*Feldman in Middelburg* 158). Martin Romberg cites this passage in his introductory note to the engraved score of Feldman's *Instruments III* (1977), seemingly to justify the decision to replace one asterisk with many (ii). In the holograph version of the score, Feldman uses an asterisk to mark the first measure as an example. In a

note, written below the first system, he explains that "the quarter rest in the beginning of the first meas[ure], and the eight[h] rest at the end is equal to a triplet figure. All rhythms such as this never add up to more than a triplet." In the engraved score, all measures that employ such a triplet are marked with an asterisk. Asterisks thus mark measures that Feldman notated somewhat unconventionally. To come back to the lecture, Feldman goes on to argue that the "graphic image" and the "sonic image" are incompatible (*Feldman in Middelburg* 1 58). Much later within the same lecture, he sings a passage from Beethoven's *Große Fuge* and asks, "Why isn't it quarter notes? Why is it two eighth notes tied? Because when you play it right that's how it sounds right" (*Feldman in Middelburg* 1 122). Quarter notes and pairs of tied eighth notes are equivalent at one level, but Feldman argues that they result in something different when it comes to performance. In a word, they indicate something different to the performer. More broadly, they indicate something different to someone reading the score.

Feldman goes further than simply claiming that notation is a form that requires mediation in order to be performed. In this regard, his emphasis on the functional aspect of unusual notation may be somewhat misleading. He claims that unusual notation sounds better in performance, but he does not — at least not here — point to the possibility that his experiments in notation are just that, experiments in notation, concerned ultimately with the form of notation rather than with its functional aspect. The problem, here, of course, consists in the relation between these two aspects; notation is not notation if its "graphic image" is separated from its "sonic image." His remarks on notation play with the tensions at work within notation itself, as well as with the different functions conventionally assigned to notation. The following passage includes two anecdotes, the first of which turns on the question of Feldman's ear. From one anecdote to the other, there is a shift from finding notes to hearing them. And within the second of the two anecdotes, there is a shift from hearing notes to writing them:

What I'm really trying to say is this: instead of the twelve-tone as a concept, I'm involved with all the 88 notes. I have a big, big world there. I remember in the 60s when I was seeing a lot of Stockhausen, who was in New York, and he says to me, "Morty, you mean to tell me that every time you have to choose a note, you have to choose it out of the 88 notes?" So I looked at him, and I said, "Karlheinz, it's easier for me to find a note on the piano and handle it than to handle one woman." (*Laughter*) To be married, or to have one girlfriend, is more complicated than to find notes. I hear them. Of course, maybe you don't hear them. Maybe you didn't know that was music. Maybe you thought music was words without music. I don't know. Talk without music, concepts without hearing. I don't know. Even John Cage said to me recently, "Morty, you mean to tell me you hear all that?" And I said, "No, I write it down to hear it." And he said, "Well, I understand that." ("Darmstadt Lecture," *Essays* 195; the passage is modified slightly to make the transcription more idiomatic; see also "Darmstadt Lecture," *Summer Gardeners* 116)

Feldman negates both music and hearing: "music ... without music ... without hearing." There is an abrupt passage from hearing preceding writing to writing preceding hearing, which happens by way of the negation of hearing. The text shifts from "I hear them [notes]" to "concepts without hearing" to "I write it down to hear it." The context for these two anecdotes, as well as for Feldman's comments on "our tradition," is a discussion of instrumentation. After encountering some resistance to his argument that "pitch is a gorgeous thing ... too beautiful for that electronic sound ... too beautiful to be played on an accordion," Feldman responds with a series of commands and a question: "listen to me, will you? Listen, I'm saying to make a leap. What is our tradition?" ("Darmstadt Lecture," *Essays* 194-95). Although Feldman insists that his audience make a leap in how they think about instrumentation and composition, he also insists that they remain within "our Western tradition."

In Feldman's scores, the relation between what happens visually and what happens musically is much more complicated than what I've sketched out so far. In 1984, the principal work that Feldman comments on at Darmstadt, the day after its first performance in Germany, is his second String Quartet. The first page of the score illustrates that what is happening visually cannot be separated from what is happening musically, but it also suggests that the eye is leading the ear (see Figures 4 and 5):

Figure 4: Morton Feldman, *String Quartet II* 1 (for string quartet, 1983).
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String Quartet No. 2
 (1983)

Morton Feldman
 (1926–1987)

♩ = 63-66

The musical score for measures 63-66 of Morton Feldman's *String Quartet No. 2* is presented in a single system with four staves. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 63-66. The dynamics are as follows:

- Measure 63:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 64:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 65:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 66:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).

The score continues with measures 67-74, which are also included in the image. The dynamics for these measures are:

- Measure 67:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 68:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 69:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 70:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 71:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 72:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 73:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).
- Measure 74:** Violin I (mp), Violin II (mp), Viola (f), Cello/DB (ppp).

Figure 5: Morton Feldman, *String Quartet II* 2 (for string quartet, 1983).
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2

The musical score is for Morton Feldman's *String Quartet II*, page 2. It is a score for a string quartet, consisting of three systems of staves. Each system contains four staves, representing the Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass parts. The music is written in a minimalist style, characterized by a high density of rests and a focus on dynamic contrast. The first system contains 10 measures, the second system contains 8 measures, and the third system contains 8 measures. The dynamic markings are varied, including *mf* (mezzo-forte), *ppp* (pianississimo), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *p* (piano). Performance instructions such as *arco* (bowed) and *pizz* (pizzicato) are used to indicate specific playing techniques. The notation is clean and precise, with clear articulation of notes and rests.

On the first page of the score, each instrument plays repeatedly the same note. In addition, the same rhythmic structure is repeated in each measure. In the first two systems, dynamics are being passed from one instrument to another, with the exception of the cello. The cello plays at the same intensity throughout the first system, then alternates between mezzo forte and ppp in the second system. The third system consists of another pattern of dynamics, a vertical pattern in which some or all of the instruments are given the same dynamic marking. The dynamics change from measure to measure, and dynamic crossings take place again at the end of the system. These "patterns," if you will, result from Feldman's handling of a limited set of musical parameters. The graphic and the musical elements of Feldman's notation are co-constitutive of these "patterns." The axis of selection (in this case, dynamic markings) is quite literally projected onto the axis of combination.

In the essay "Crippled Symmetry" (1981), published two years before the musical work of the same name, Feldman draws attention to a pattern in his first String Quartet that is similar to the one just described, a pattern in which instruments exchange both time signatures and the number of sounds per measure, rather than dynamics (96). In the same essay, Feldman describes two of his rugs, one of which is illustrated by a black and white photograph. These descriptions of rugs are followed by more general comments on the "coloration" of rugs. Feldman's descriptions draw attention to both the color and the patterns of his rugs. Although his subsequent discussion of coloration dwells on the feature called "abrash," a feature that is specific to fields of more or less the same color, he ultimately comes back to "patterns," even if it requires quite a jump to do so:

I'm being distracted by a small Turkish village rug of white tile patterns in a diagonal repeat of large stars in lighter tones of red, green, and beige. ... Everything about the rug's coloration, and how the stars are drawn in detail, when the rectangle of a tile is even, how the star is just sketched (as if drawn more quickly), when a tile is uneven and a little bit smaller — this, as well as the staggered placement of the pattern, brings to mind Matisse's mastery of his seesaw balance between movement and stasis. Why is it that even asymmetry has to look and sound right? There is another Anatolian woven object on my floor, which I refer to as the "Jasper Johns" rug. It is an arcane checkerboard format, with no apparent systematic color design except for a free use of the rug's colors reiterating its simple pattern. Implied in the glossy pile (though unevenly worn) of the mountainous Konya region, the older pinks, and lighter blues — was my first hint that there was something there that I could learn, if not apply to my music. The color-scale of most nonurban rugs appears more extensive than it actually is, due to the great variation of shades of the same color (abrash) — a result of the yarn having been dyed in small quantities. As a composer, I respond to this most singular aspect affecting a rug's coloration and its creation of a monochromatic overall hue. My music has been influenced mainly by the methods in which color is used on essentially simple devices. It has made me question the nature of musical material. What could be used to accommodate, by equally simple means, musical color? Patterns. (93-94)

This passage shifts repeatedly from the specific to the general. Beginning with the end of the first paragraph, it also shifts repeatedly between rugs and music. These two tendencies control the organization of the passage quoted, as does the use of disjunction. The ends of both paragraphs are characterized by abrupt shifts — from rugs to music at the end of the first paragraph, and from color to patterns at the end of the second paragraph.

The description of rugs is focalized, as it were, by Feldman's "I," which also frames the passage as a whole. The shifts from rugs to music coincide with the foregrounding of this "I" and other first-person pronouns. These first-person pronouns "get us" from the coloration of rugs to a statement regarding the use of color in general. Rather than simply examining rugs, Feldman is now subordinating his interest in rugs to that other interest of his, composition. The "it" in "It has made me question the nature of musical material" can be matched up with "abrash." This statement echoes the opening of the essay, except that rather than speaking of symmetry, as at the beginning, here he is speaking of color. At the very end of the paragraph, Feldman makes the passage from "musical material" to "patterns" by asking a question, a question in which there is still another passage, from color on simple devices to "musical color." Beginning with "As a composer" there are three sentences that pair rugs (or color) and music. With the question regarding "musical color," these topics are no longer paired; rather, one is collapsed into the other: the word "color" is transferred, carried over from the visual realm to the musical realm. What Feldman says about "musical color" and "patterns" may remain obscure for a reader who is not familiar with his music or, more particularly, with his scores. Feldman

plays upon this; he speaks to two audiences at once — musicians and non-musicians — but the function is the same for both: to draw them towards the work ("work" consisting not only of performances and scores, but the writings themselves). Given Feldman's examples, "musical color" may be understood as abrash-like effects in music, and "patterns" as graphically-driven forms of instrumentation.

The final, one-word sentence, "Patterns," provides a musical analogue, an analogue for thinking about color in music. While Feldman has spoken of the patterns in his two rugs, and while rug patterns are surely implied in Feldman's "methods in which color is used on essentially simple devices," the paragraph in which this sentence appears focuses, rather, on abrash and on the function of color. The jump from abrash to patterns coincides with the more belabored passage from rugs to music. Rather than a homology — between visual patterns and musical patterns, or between visual patterns in the visual arts and visual patterns in music — we get a series of substitutions: "color ... musical material ... musical color ... patterns." The word "patterns" constitutes, perhaps, an allusion to the visibility of notation, but the passing mention of "musical material" suggests that these patterns are, strictly speaking, musical. At the same time, if "musical material" is understood to refer to notation, these patterns are, then, at once, visual and musical. The mention of "musical color," in contrast, occurs in a sentence that reworks the statement regarding color in the visual arts — Feldman seeks an "equally simple means" for employing color in music. The parallel between the visual arts and music is stated particularly strongly here, but this does not make the relation between them any less obscure. Feldman sets up a parallel between abrash in rugs and patterns in music. The problem, perhaps, is that we expect Feldman's patterns to be modeled on patterns in rugs, not on abrash.

Feldman's late work is punctuated by numerous references to the material culture of the Near, Middle, and Far East. He alludes to textiles from these regions in the titles of several musical works composed between 1977 and 1985: *Spring of Chosroes* (1977), *Why Patterns?* (1978), *The Turfan Fragments* (1980), *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* [also known as *Untitled Composition for Cello and Piano*] (1981), *Crippled Symmetry* (1983), and *Coptic Light* (1985). In addition to providing allusions in his titles, Feldman frequently comments on "Oriental" rugs in texts from the 1980s. These texts, like the titles, draw on a large body of Orientalist knowledge, the connoisseurship of rugs and other textiles. Feldman repeatedly sets up a relation between rugs and his music. Because this relation is sketched largely in terms of generalizations, parallels, and metaphorical exchanges, rather than specific examples, Feldman's presentation is often somewhat enigmatic.

There is a slight hint, at the beginning of the essay "Crippled Symmetry," that the very notion of symmetry is at stake: "A growing interest in Near and Middle Eastern rugs has made me question notions I previously held on what is symmetrical and what is not. In the Anatolian village and nomadic rugs there appears to be considerably less concern with the exact accuracy of the mirror image than in most other rug-producing areas. The detail of an Anatolian symmetrical image was never mechanical, as I had expected, but idiomatically drawn. Even the Classical Turkish carpet was not as particular with perfect border solutions as was its Persian counterpart" (91). His comments consist of a series of generalizations concerning the question of symmetry in certain types of rugs. The conclusions that Feldman draws from comparing one type of rug to another are difficult for someone without Feldman's knowledge of rugs to appreciate. The text provides only one illustration of a rug. This illustration appears, in the original publication, on the second page of the essay, opposite a painting by Mondrian. Both reproductions are in black and white. I have already cited Feldman's description of this rug, which begins "I'm being distracted by a small Turkish rug" Feldman is distracted as he writes. This scene of writing would seem to be staged, in part, to suggest that the scene of composing is not altogether different. Feldman goes on to emphasize both the color and the design of the rug, without clearly linking the description to the illustration (the recent exhibition, "Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts," curated by Juan Manuel Bonet at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, included seven rugs from Feldman's former collection, including the one illustrated in "Crippled Symmetry"; the catalog includes color reproductions of all seven rugs [see Bonet]).

At the beginning of the essay, there is a narrative of correction: Feldman corrects assumptions he had about symmetry in general and about rugs in particular; his interest in rugs has made him question these assumptions. The expectation of symmetry is repeatedly situated in the past ("notions I previously held," "as I had expected"). These temporal framings provide the context for a shift from

the specific ("Near and Middle Eastern rugs") to the general ("what is symmetrical and what is not"), as well as for a series of distinctions concerning the question of symmetry. All of the forms of rugs that Feldman refers to are projected into the past, as is the restatement of the frame of his own expectations, which concerns the difference between the mechanical and the idiomatic ("The detail of an Anatolian symmetrical image was never mechanical, as I had expected, but idiomatically drawn"). Feldman privileges irregularity over mirror symmetry and tidy borders. The illustration, Feldman's comments on this particular rug, and the title of the essay itself all put pressure on the definition of symmetry. In the rug, there are clearly identifiable patterns, but the patterns are reiterated in such a way as to draw attention to differences between one "pattern" and another.

Feldman also refers to his interest in rugs in an interview conducted in 1983 by the percussionist Jan Williams. At one point, Feldman himself asks, "how do you handle instruments that just have inherent problems of not sounding expensive?" (Williams 8). Feldman has already drawn attention to the decision percussionists must make when selecting cymbals for *Oboe and Orchestra* (1976). Here, the discussion turns, rather, to instrumentation:

Well, my approach to an instrument is finding instruments where terms like "perfection" and "imperfection" of construction are not important. The whole idea of going in tune and out of tune with more precise acoustical instruments is taken into consideration. It was actually with my interest in nomadic oriental rugs that really made me start to use "imperfect" percussion with considerably more security. I'll tell you how. In older oriental rugs the dyes are made in small amounts and so what happens is that there is an imperfection throughout the rug of changing colors of these dyes. Most people feel that they are imperfections. Actually it is the refraction of the light on these small dye batches that makes the rugs wonderful. I interpreted this as going in and out of tune. There is a name for that in rugs – it's called abrash – a change of colors that leads us into pieces like *Instruments III* [dated July 15, 1977] which was the beginning of my rug idea. I wouldn't say I actually made a literal juxtaposition between rugs and the use of instruments in *Instruments III*, but it made me not worry about it. I like the imperfections and it added to the color. It enriched the color, this out of tune quality. (9-10)

Feldman's reading of abrash in "nomadic Oriental rugs" as "going in and out of tune" relates one cultural practice to another. His emphasis on the mode of production and its relation to abrash is not only a matter of his interest in materiality; it reproduces the Orientalist practice of fetishization that has commodified rugs through collecting. His denegation in "I wouldn't say I actually made a literal juxtaposition between rugs and the use of instruments" is nearly, if not completely, undone by what follows: "it made me not worry about it." For Feldman, the irregularities of color in rugs make it possible for him not to worry about whether or not he "literalizes" what he finds there. There is clearly something troubling, for Feldman, in the idea of a "literal juxtaposition." Feldman's language is, itself, loose, imprecise, when speaking of what it means to take "imperfection" as a model. His use of "it" seems designed to avoid a parallel construction, even if he speaks of not being worried about such a juxtaposition (see Figures 6 and 7):

Figure 6: Morton Feldman, *Instruments III* 1 (for flute, oboe, and percussion, 1977).
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INSTRUMENTS III

Morton Feldman

1 circa 63

ALTO FL.

ENG HN.

PERC.

5

10

15

20

25

* the quarter rest in the beginning of the first measure, and the eighth rest at the end is equal to a triplet figure. 20 rhizome such as this never adding more than 1 triplet

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Figure 7: Morton Feldman, *Instruments III* 2 (for flute, oboe, and percussion, 1977).
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The image displays three systems of handwritten musical notation for Morton Feldman's *Instruments III* 2. Each system consists of three staves: ALTO FL. (Alto Flute), ENG. HN. (English Horn), and PERC. (Percussion). The first system covers measures 30 to 35, the second system covers measures 40 to 45, and the third system covers measure 50. The notation is in 3/16 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Percussion parts are marked with 'L.V.' (Low Voice), 'GLUCK', 'cym.' (cymbal), and 'LY' (Lyra). The score is written on a light-colored background with some visible paper texture and faint bleed-through from the reverse side.

Instruments III is a work for flute (doubling piccolo and alto flute in G), oboe (doubling English horn), and percussion (consisting of glockenspiel, 3 cymbals, and triangle). As already noted, in the holograph version of the score, Feldman marks the first measure with an asterisk and specifies that the combination of quarter rest and eighth rest "is equal to a triplet figure." A triplet is a form of rhythmic subdivision: three notes are performed in the same amount of time as two notes of the same value. Feldman divides the triplet between the beginning and end of the measure. Feldman's note introduces a form of notational shorthand; it marks an unmarked "triplet figure." Structurally, the division of these triplets contributes to the rhythmic complexity of the work. The divided parts form a frame for whatever appears within them, and the asymmetrical division of the triplet has the effect of making the bracketed sounds not align with the beat. The score is written in C. In the first seven measures, the alto flute and the English horn exchange pitches while the percussionist descends from the highest of the three cymbals to the lowest. The flute and the horn sound together in the first measure, each playing one note (D and A-flat, respectively). They continue to sound together, in an irregularly shaped rhythmic structure, with each instrument playing the note that the other instrument has most recently played. Within the first seven measures, the percussionist sounds three times, whereas the flute and horn sound together four times. The percussionist is not aligned rhythmically with the other instruments, except at the end of the seventh measure. For the flute and horn, the seventh measure is an inversion of the first measure, with the addition of a trill for the horn. In the eighth measure, all instruments are silent, and in the ninth, all sound together: the flute, as before, plays the last note of the horn (with the trill); the horn introduces a new note; and the glockenspiel repeats a two-note chord (which also introduces new notes) five times. In the ninth measure, the alignment of all three instruments within a divided triplet forms something of a coda to what has come before. Since each system, in the holograph score, consists of nine measures, the relation between measures 1-7 and 9 suggests not only that Feldman is organizing material within individual systems, but that he is dividing the systems unevenly. Whereas the time signature in the first system changes from measure to measure, with the only recognizable pattern being the repetition of 3/2 in the seventh measure, the time signature in the second system has a regular pattern, alternating between 2/2 and 3/16, following the first measure in 3/2. The first measure of the second system echoes that of the first, with the percussionist returning to the highest of the three cymbals. The third system extends the every-other-measure in 3/16 pattern, but the time signatures of the alternating measures are irregular.

The horn player is silent in the first seven measures of the second system (measures 10-16). In measure 11, the flute rises a half-step, and in measures 13 through 18, it ascends, beginning on the last note played by the horn, a note that broke the initial pattern of alternation by introducing a new note. The flute ascends from this C-sharp to the D that has been repeated from the beginning, to an A-flat one octave higher than that in measures 1 through 7. Beginning in measure 17, the flute and horn alternate playing the same sound, with the horn always entering before the flute has finished sounding. This continues through measure 24. The cymbals alternate between sounding and not-sounding in the first two systems, in a pattern that takes up two and, sometimes, three measures. This pattern of repetition forms something of a frame for the woodwinds, or even a "border," a border that is not entirely in sync with what it frames. The instruments do not go in and out of phase — there is no regular pulse — but they do, at various moments, overlap, coincide, or otherwise sound together. All three performers coincide rhythmically in measure 9, a moment that marks the undoing of the opening "pattern." The flute and horn coincide again in measures 25-26, which marks, along with the figure on the glockenspiel that begins in measure 24, an inner division of the third system. The second page is characterized by passages in which the flute and horn repeatedly play the same note. The exceptions to this occur at the beginning and end of the page, where the horn repeatedly rises and falls (in a sequence that begins when it coincides with the flute in measure 25), and where the flute and horn once again sound together and exchange notes (measures 45-53).

Feldman's comments about the juxtaposition of rugs and instruments pertain most specifically to later passages, where one or the other or both of the woodwinds play in the upper registers. The first of these passages occurs on page three, and includes the passing of notes from one instrument to another. Among the other aspects of this passage is mirror-like movement, with the flute and horn mov-

ing in opposite directions, in terms of pitch (measures 66-72, for instance). There are also extended passages for alto flute where the flute repeats the same note or plays a note a half-step higher (measures 76-82). This anticipates the moment when the horn player changes to oboe and often plays pitches just a half-step away from those played on the alto flute (measures 116-24). As performed by the Barton Workshop, these passages produce sounds that one might call "out of tune."

In his lecture at Darmstadt in 1984, Feldman makes a connection between his use of unusual spellings — specifically double flats and double sharps — and rugs. The discussion hinges on the relation between notation and hearing:

Another very interesting man, the father of cybernetics, of the computer, had a marvelous phrase. Norbert Wiener. "Hardening of the categories." You know hardening of the arteries? Hardening of the categories. And that's what happens. They get very hard. Which gets us, believe it or not, to why I use the spelling, more microtonal spelling. The hardening of the distance, say, between a minor second. When you're working with a minor second as long as I've been, it's very wide. I hear a minor second like a minor third almost. It's very, very wide. (*Laughter*). So that perception of hearing is a very interesting thing. Because, conceptually you are not hearing it, but perceptually, you might be able to hear it. So it depends upon how quickly or slowly that note is coming to you, like McEnroe. I'm sure that he sees that ball coming in slow motion. And that's the way I hear that pitch. It's coming to me very slowly, and there's a lot of stuff in there. But I don't use it conceptually. That's why I use the double flats. People think they're leading tones. I don't know. Think what you want. But I use it because I think it's a very practical way of still having the focus of the pitch. And after all, what's a sharp? It's directional, right? And a double sharp is more directional. But I didn't get the idea conceptually, I got the idea from *Teppiche*, from rugs. (Walter already told you about my interest in *Teppiche*). But one of the most interesting things about a beautiful old rug in natural vegetable dyes, is that it has "abrash." "Abrash" is that you dye in small quantities. You cannot dye in big bulks of wool. So it's the same, but yet it's not the same. It has a kind of microtonal hue. So when you look at it, it has that kind of marvellous shimmer which is that slight gradation. ("Darmstadt Lecture," *Essays* 192-93; the passage is modified slightly to make the transcription more idiomatic; see also "Darmstadt Lecture," *Summer Gardeners* 114-15)

Every time that Feldman uses the word "conceptual," it appears in the context of a negation: "conceptually you are not hearing it"; "But I don't use it conceptually"; "But I didn't get the idea conceptually." The first of these negations is followed by an affirmation: "But perceptually, you might be able to hear it." The negations are integrated into parallelisms: "conceptually, you are not hearing it, but perceptually, you might be able to hear it"; "But I don't use it conceptually. That's why I use the double flats"; "But I didn't get the idea conceptually, I got the idea from *Teppiche*, from rugs." Feldman's repeated denegations of the conceptual have the function of making the passage from not hearing to hearing, from hearing to unusual spellings, and from notation to rugs. Further, he discusses the gradations of a single color in a rug in a passage that comments on both how he hears a minor second and his use of unusual spellings. By saying that a sharp is "directional" and a double sharp "more directional," Feldman suggests how unusual spellings are to be read. His remarks apply, in effect, to all spellings. A sharp is directional in the sense that it indicates a pitch higher than that notated on the staff. Conventionally, an accidental — a single sharp or flat — indicates a half-step up or down. A double-sharp or double-flat potentially indicates a whole step. Although unusual spellings can be read in this way, Feldman leaves the door open to other possibilities. He insists twice that what he is doing is not conceptual, which is consistent with the way that he speaks of accidentals, as well as with his emphasis on "the focus of the pitch," which implies that pitches are granted a certain singularity, rather than being determined by precise intervals within a system of tuning.

Feldman refers to the rug as having "a kind of microtonal hue." This echoes what he says about notation: "I use the spelling, more microtonal spelling." He transfers an adjective that applies to sounds and to notation ("microtonal") to rugs. What he says of the batches of wool also applies, perhaps, to sounds notated with unusual spellings: "So it's the same, but yet it's not the same." The analogy between notation and rugs depends on the formal properties of particular rugs, and Feldman underlines that these properties are tied to the material conditions of production. Feldman's emphasis again falls on the mode of production in his further comments on dying: "I also got my feeling of doubling and how I want to double, or how I want to hear a certain note, from music, as well, of course, from my ears. But also from something that's very, very beautiful in that *Teppich*, rug. If you want a deep blue, you cannot get it on the first dye. It has to be re-dyed over and over again. And the whole

idea of someone doing it outdoors where I know how long it took her to re-dye and re-dye because she was very fussy about the timbre of her dye, is something that influenced me. ("Darmstadt Lecture," *Essays* 193; the passage is modified slightly to make the transcription more idiomatic; see also "Darmstadt Lecture," *Summer Gardeners* 114-15). Ostensibly, Feldman's fantasy concerning the production of rugs has to do with what he calls his "feeling of doubling." But what interests Feldman in the figure of the dyer? The dyer repeats the action of dying in order to obtain a desired effect. The dyer is very fussy about the "timbre" of her dye, just as Feldman is very fussy about the "timbre" of his pitches. As for "the whole idea of someone doing it out of doors," Feldman's emphasis on the rustic nature of the labor itself is symptomatic of his fetishization of rugs. It is precisely this labor that creates the specificity that Feldman draws attention to most often in his discussions of rugs. Whereas Feldman links abrasion to musical patterns in "Crippled Symmetry," here he links dying to doubling. The end of "Crippled Symmetry" undoes the distinction emphasized at the beginning of the essay, the difference between "what is symmetrical and what is not." Following an anecdote concerning a comment of Rothko's on scale, Feldman adds, "Like that small Turkish 'tile' rug, it is Rothko's scale that removes any argument over the proportions of one area to another, or over its degree of symmetry or asymmetry" ("Crippled Symmetry" 103). According to Feldman, Rothko finds "that particular scale which suspends all proportions in equilibrium" ("Crippled Symmetry" 103). Here, Feldman comments on Rothko's work in general. This is not unusual; he rarely comments in detail on particular works. His boldest statements are generalizations. Patterns in music need not be strictly musical. Feldman's conventionally notated scores show less an *abeyance* of the "question of symmetry and asymmetry" than a tension between them. Such tension necessarily involves the viscosity of notated musical patterns.

Note: I thank the staff of the Music Library at the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, for assistance with reproductions.

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